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When (true) disagreement gives out

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Abstract

In this paper, I take issue with the proposal put forward by Mark Richard in *When Truth Gives Out* (2008) concerning disputes over issues such as who is rich, what is cool, and other issues of similar ilk. Richard holds that the parties in the dispute can truly disagree on whether a given person is rich, but can be both right, if we assume that they have different standards of wealth,. Disputes over what is cool are, according to Richard, trickier, since they can give rise to cases of faultless disagreement in which the two parties disagree, and neither party is wrong, but neither party is right either! My first goal in this paper will be to show that the distinction between the two types of disagreement, as drawn by Richard, is not well motivated. I will also argue that if he were right about the stronger case (disagreement in which both parties are right), his own account would fail to capture it. He can capture either the idea that they truly disagree, or the idea that they are both right; but he cannot both have his cake and eat it, too.

My second goal will be to bring to the foreground some constructive aspects of Richard's proposal, and in particular the idea that such disagreements involve concepts whose application is not fully determined and whose usage is open to accommodation and negotiation (to use Lewis's terms, as used by Richard). If we accept that on some occasions, whether a concept applies to a given instance or doesn't is not yet settled, then arguably there are cases in which neither party is wrong – at least at the time of the dispute. I argue that their disagreement can be genuine only to the extent that it *will* eventually be settled whether the concept is to apply to a given instance or not, hence the way in which the concept gets shaped up and extended through its *future* uses makes it possible to determine, retrospectively, which of the two parties got it right. If this is correct, then the putative cases of faultless disagreement really turn upon the openness of the future: what makes them "faultless" is, simply, that there isn't any matter of fact *yet* whether the one or the other party is right.

Sect. I Richard on disagreement and truth

Richard's *When Truth Gives Out* develops around the idea that the notion of truth, contrary to a lot of received wisdom from philosophy of language and logic, is not — or at least, not always — the right concept to employ in analyzing belief, assertion, or their evaluation. The book's five chapters could have worked equally well as independent essays, but the choice of compiling those pieces into a monograph, rather than a mere collection of essays, is motivated by the fact that each chapter addresses, sometimes in different ways and from different angles, the question of whether the notions of truth and falsity should be central to the analysis of a range of phenomena regarding thought, discourse, inference and disagreement. The take-home message of the book is that if one is prepared to give up the centrality of the notion of truth — whether one trades it for the notion of *relative* truth or, more radically, decides that even relative truth is not the right dimension to understand belief and assertion — then one can start perceiving promising solutions to several long-standing puzzles from philosophy of language, logic and epistemology.

In this paper, I will be exclusively concerned with the last two chapters: Ch. IV,

What's the Matter with Relativism? (which largely overlaps with Richard's 2004 paper) and, to a lesser extent, Ch. V, *Matters of Taste*. In both chapters, Richard is concerned with the issue of disagreement: in Ch. IV, he addresses the question of how there can be disagreement over the issue of whether a given object or individual has a given property (such as the property of being rich), yet disagreement in which both of the parties seem to be right (or, on a weaker construal, neither party is wrong); in Ch. V, he turns to disagreement over matters of taste, e.g. whether vegemite is tasty or whether Ethan Hawke is attractive, where the intuition that neither party is wrong is, one may think, even stronger. Richard believes that there is a neat distinction between the two types of cases; I believe that he is wrong in that respect. But before I go on to articulate my concerns regarding the distinction that he wants to draw, and, more importantly, regarding the account itself that he is proposing, let us first get clear about the account itself, and the motivations on which it relies.

In Ch. IV, Richard presents his core example: Didi and Naomi's disagreement as to whether Mary, who won a million-dollar lottery, is rich. Didi holds that she is rich, while Naomi, for whom a million dollars is not that much, holds that she is not. He then points out that since Didi and Naomi happen to have different standards of wealth, there seems to be no objective way of adjudicating between Didi and Naomi.

It should be noted that the predicate 'rich' is a *gradable* adjective, and Richard is aware that gradable adjectives are sensitive to contextual variations: if Didi says that Mary is rich in a conversation about life conditions in derelict suburbs of some very poor country, while Naomi says that she is not rich in a conversation about Bill Gates and Donald Trump, then it becomes easy (at least from the point of view of the standard semantic accounts of gradable adjectives)[1] to account for the idea that both Didi and Naomi may be right. The gradable adjectives' dependence on the so-called *comparison class* is no news, and can be assimilated in a fairly straightforward way to familiar forms of context-dependence, like indexicality. Thus e.g. if I say 'It's raining' in Paris, and you say 'It's not raining' in New York, we can obviously both speak truth. But Richard insists that the phenomenon that he is interested in is not dependence on a comparison class, and that it cannot be assimilated to any form of indexicality. For, he argues, when the comparison classes are different, we loose the intuition of disagreement, to the same extent that we have no such intuition if I say

1 See e.g. Kamp (1975), and, more recently, Kennedy and McNally (2005), Kennedy (2007).

that it's raining and you say that it isn't, but I am in Paris and you are in New York. Indeed, Naomi might well accept that Mary is rich relative to the population of those derelict suburbs, and that, at the same time, she is not rich compared to Trump, Gates, etc. Richard's scenario is, by assumption, one in which "the salient comparison class is the same in both cases (it is, say, New Yorkers)" (p. 93). The reason why we can fix the comparison class and still be unable to adjudicate between Didi and Naomi is that each person places the threshold demarcating the rich from the non-rich at a different level of the richness scale. Naomi's threshold is below one million dollar, while Didi's is further up.

Now, gradable adjectives' dependence on a threshold point *in addition to* a comparison class (or an ordered class, that is, a scale) is no news either. Whether or not Richard, noticeably parsimonious in his references to the vast literature on adjectives and vagueness, was aware that the importance of thresholds had been previously acknowledged, one should grant him the insight that thresholds and comparison classes, *qua* parameters on which truth value depends, are not on a par.[2] While Naomi may consistently say 'Mary is rich in comparison with inhabitants of derelict suburbs, but isn't rich in comparison with millionaires,' it would be odd for her to say 'Mary is rich for a New Yorker relative to a threshold set below one million, but is not rich for a New Yorker relative to a threshold set further up.' To put the same point differently, one can be tall for an ordinary person without being tall for a basketball player, but one either is or isn't tall for a basketball player. Whether one is tall for a basketball player requires, of course, fixing a cut-off point within the tallness scale (as restricted to the class of basketball players). But once the comparison class is fixed, one cannot go on playing around with thresholds (or, at least, not with the same flexibility with which one can play around with comparison classes). So, summing up, when F is an adjective such as 'tall' or 'rich,' in order to interpret the claim that F applies to some object X, one must first determine the relevant comparison class. Parties who disagree whether X is F, while relying on different comparison classes, are only engaged in spurious disagreement. This does not seem to hold for threshold-dependence. When Naomi and Didi disagree whether Mary is rich for a New Yorker, the interpretation is not at issue. Each understands

2 Of course, Richard himself does not put his point in these terms. Indeed, it is unclear whether he would even accept the idea that when one spells out the truth clause for a gradable adjective, one would include a threshold parameter, in addition to the comparison class parameter. Nevertheless, I think that my construal of Richard's view gives us helpful means of tracking what is going on.

what the other is claiming, there is no misunderstanding of any sort, and yet, we seem to lack objective grounds on which to adjudicate between them, to decide that the one rather than the other got the facts right. From the point of view of the standards that Naomi is adopting, she is right and Didi is wrong, while from the point of view of the standards that Didi is adopting, she is right and Naomi is wrong. But if both can be simultaneously right and wrong, then (absolute) truth must give out!

Now, how can there be genuine, substantive disagreement that is not cashed out in terms of truth and falsity? Richard's answer is twofold. First, Didi and Naomi's disagreement is substantive because they share all the concepts involved in the issue over which they disagree, and, in particular, the concept denoted by the predicate 'rich.' To illustrate the point, suppose that Mary is a dentist, and Didi says 'Mary is good' while Naomi says 'Mary is not good.' If Didi means to be saying that Mary is a good dentist, while Naomi means to be saying that Mary is not a (morally) good person, then their uses of the predicate 'good' arguably denote different concepts, and their disagreement is merely verbal, rather than substantive. Secondly, it is not necessary, according to Richard, that either of the disagreeing parties should get the facts right and latch onto truth. In the picture that he proposes, there is a certain concept in place, the concept of being rich, but the *extension* of the concept, i.e. the range of individuals to which the concept applies, is not determined by the concept itself (together with the facts). Rather, it is, as one might say, open-ended, and gets more and more determined as the concept starts getting entrenched in a linguistic community. Here are two excerpts from Ch. IV that suggest such an interpretation:

> "Because 'rich' is subject to accommodation, speakers in different conversations (...) are able to impose different extensions (and thus intensions) on 'rich'; the result is that different speaker's uses of 'Mary is rich' can have different truth-values" (p. 100)
>
> "What a concept or notion is a concept or notion *of* gets worked out over time via something like a process of cultural accommodation and negotiation" (p. 116).

In other words, accommodation and negotiation are processes that make room for a notion of disagreement that falls in between, on the one hand, merely verbal disagreement and, on the other, merely factual disagreement; a notion of

disagreement that is arguably substantial, yet overrides the dimension of purely extensional notions such as truth and falsity.

In Ch. V, Richard is still concerned with disagreement, but turns his attention to disagreements over what is cool, who is hot, wh good-looking, what is yummy, and so on, and suggests that 'judgments about what is cool and other matters of taste enjoy a *double relativity*' (p. 132, my italics). Consider our disagreement over the issue of whether some person, e.g. Ethan Hawke, is attractive. We can both give reasons and arguments that support our respective judgments. That would suffice to make our disagreement substantive, yet there seems to be no objective basis to say that the one rather than the other got the facts right. From my perspective, Hawke is attractive, from yours, he is not, and the reason why, under this scenario, it makes sense to continue arguing about the issue is that our shared concept of attractiveness is subject to accommodation and negotiation; we would have, again, the same sort of relativity as the one discussed in Chapter IV concerning disagreement over who is rich and who isn't. But Richard now points out that 'not only may the assignment of a truth-value to a claim be 'perspective-relative,' but whether a claim is truth-apt may also be 'perspective-relative' " (p. 126). The idea is that unlike judging whether Mary is rich, which precludes, in Richard's view, that the disagreeing parties themselves may recognize that they may be relying on different standards of weath, and that consequently the other party need not be wrong, when we judge whether Hawke is attractive, we are not so much making judgments that he is or isn't attractive, as judgments (or reports, if you prefer) that we find him attractive or don't. Here is an excerpt from the Introduction in which Richard stresses the distinction:

> "[W]hile we recognize that we may disagree about these thing [who is handsome, who sexy, what is hip, etc.], we also acknowledge that in (some) such matters neither of those who disagree need be making a mistake. And this is not something that the relativist – at least not the relativist of Chapter 4 – thinks possible. If Didi thinks Mary is rich, and Naomi thinks that Mary is not rich, Didi thinks that Naomi is *wrong*, for Didi thinks it's *false* that Mary is rich." (p. 10)

Richard's goal in Ch. V is, in sum, to make room for a notion of disagreement in which we disagree, yet we allow that the persons with whom we disagree "are not

making a mistake about the matter" (p. 11).

Sect. II Disagreeing with Richard

As we have just seen in the last section, Richard wants to distinguish between two types of faultless disagreement: those whose paradigmatic example is the case of Didi and Naomi debating whether Mary is rich, in which (i) they truly disagree, (ii) they are both right (from their own perspectives), and (iii) they both believe that the other is wrong; and, secondly, those whose paradigmatic case are disputes over matters of taste, over who is attractive and what is cool, in which (i) the two parties truly disagree, (ii) they are both right (from their own perspectives), and (iii) they do not believe that the other is either wrong or mistaken in any other respect. For the ease of exposition, let us call the former '*rich*' disagreements, and the latter, '*cool*' disagreements. Now, my first problem with Richard's view (at least as presented in his book) is that he does not really argue for this distinction, nor does he argue for the idea that only disagreements over matters of taste can be 'cool'. (I take it, on the other hand, that he accepts that in certain cases, disagreements on what is cool can give rise to 'rich' disagreement: for instance, if I were to learn that you believe that it is cool to intimidate students who lack self-confidence, I would certainly think that you *are* wrong – and very much so).

Why should cool disagreements only arise with judgments of taste? Why should it be implausible, for instance, to hold that Didi's evaluation of Mary as rich might be of the same kind as my evaluation of Hawke as attractive? In either case, the agent would be simply *asserting her own perspective*, to use a phrase from Lasersohn (2005), rather than making a "truth-apt" judgment to the effect that Mary *is* rich or that Hawke *is* attractive. In putting forward the distinction, Richard merely relies on the assumption that the reader will share his intuitions. But this is far from obvious. Let's forget for the moment about Didi, Naomi and Mary, and consider the issue whether I, with my little salary of a French academic, am rich. I (and most of the people I know) would judge that I am not rich.[3] But I would also understand that from the point of view of someone who lives in misery – say, who lives without

3 We wouldn't judge that I am poor either, but rather, somewhere on the borderline (towards its lower end, I'm afraid).

electricity and running water – I *am* rich. And were such a person to express their judgment, I would even find it inappropriate to argue with them whether I am rich or not – even though I still firmly believe that I am not.[4] In other words, just as I may, to use Richard's jargon, 'acknowledge as acceptable' the perspective of someone who doesn't think that Ethan Hawke is attractive, I may equally well acknowledge as acceptable the perspective of someone who thinks that I am rich (even though I am not), or, for that matter, the perspective of someone who thinks that I am poor (even though I am not).

To bring the point home, what I am objecting here to Richard is that he didn't give us any criteria to decide when a disagreement is 'cool' as opposed to 'rich': he has simply relied on intuitions that turn out to be rather shaky. Now, interestingly, there is a more robust difference between disagreeing whether people are rich vs. whether they are attractive. It is the fact that when we turn to the comparative form, disagreement evaporates in the one case but persists in the other.[5] Thus while Naomi and Didi may disagree whether Mary is rich *simpliciter*, they will not at all disagree whether Mary is richer than Khaled (assuming each knows what Mary and Khaled own respectively). On the other hand, people will disagree not only whether Hawke is attractive *simpliciter*, but also, whether he is more attractive than, say, Javier Bardem. So I am not denying that there may be interesting differences between matters of taste and other matters.[6] Rather, what I am objecting to Richard is that he fails to spell them out properly. What is more, assuming that, as noted above, he is willing to accept that in certain cases of disagreement over taste, the parties in the dispute do take one another to be wrong, then the two types of disagreement ('rich' vs. 'cool') simply cut across the distinction between disagreement over taste vs. disagreement over something else.

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4 Someone might want to say that in the scenario I have described, the reason why I can consistently think that I am not rich and that from the point of view of someone who lives in misery, I am rich, is that the comparison classes are different. I don't think that this would resolve the issue, for we can make the case such that it is clear that the relevant comparison class is *everyone* on the planet.

5 This feature has been emphasized in the linguistic literature on predicates of personal taste; see e.g. Glanzberg (2007) and Anand (ms.). Another linguistic feature that distinguishes predicates of taste from other predicates is the felicity with which they can occur in 'find'-constructions. Thus "Naomi finds Hawke attractive" is 100% good, while "Naomi finds Mary rich" is bad (although "Naomi finds Mary to be rich" is acceptable).

6 It is nevertheless doubtful that the distinction as it arises in the comparative case can account for the distinction that Richard seeks to bring to light. For, some of the paradigmatic predicates of personal taste are not even gradable – thus, something either is or isn't delicious, but normally, you wouldn't say that one thing is "more delicious" than another. In French, at any rate, the adjective 'délicieux' does not allow for comparison. (I am grateful to my student François Le Corre for this observation.)

In the remainder of the paper, I will concentrate on 'rich' disagreement cases. For those cases, Richard seems to slide back and forth between two sorts of account (that he presumably takes to be complementing each other):

(i) a *relativist* account, on which Naomi and Didi disagree because the one asserts what the other denies (viz. that Mary is rich); nevertheless, they can be both right, because relative to the one's standards, Mary is rich, and relative to the other's standards, she isn't.[7]

(ii) a *contextualist-à-la-Lewis* account,[8] on which the disagreement between Didi and Naomi presupposes that they have a certain concept in common, denoted by the predicate 'rich', but the exact extension of this concept is not fully determined yet and remains open to accommodation and negotiation.

In the remainder of this section, I will discuss and criticize the account in (i),[9] leaving the more plausible account in (ii) for the next section. But let me first quote some passages from Richard (one from the book and one from a recent paper) that illustrate the relativist line of his proposal:

> "Didi and Naomi disagree. So there is something that Didi says and Naomi denies. Within the confines of each woman's conversation, each use of 'is rich' is correct. So Didi says something true in her context when she utters 'Mary is rich', Naomi says something true in hers when she utters the sentence's denial. This is consistent with the two disagreeing over the truth of a single claim, if the truth of the claim may be relative." (2008, p. 99)
>
> "You think Mary is rich, I think your criteria for wealth are defective and that in fact Mary is not rich. Thinking that my criteria are better than yours, I think that

7 Richard is clearly aware that this cannot be the end of the story, hence his endeavor to complement the proposal with a story about concepts being open to accommodation and negotiation. However, other "relativists" are sometimes less cautious. Thus Lasersohn, despite a number of criticisms to the account proposed in Lasersohn (2005), still writes: "If two contexts have different judges, (...) the sentence and its negation could both be true (relative to their separate contexts). *This allows us an explanation of faultless disagreement*: two sentences can express mutually contradictory contents, yet both be true relative to different individuals" (2009, my italics).

8 The term 'contextualism' is one of the most versatile philosophical terms nowadays, and it can be quite misleading to talk of contextualism vs. relativism, since there are a number of different issues at stake, so that certain views can be said to be both 'contextualist' and 'relativist', depending on the issue that one has in mind (for discussion, see Stojanovic (2008)). The sense in which Richard's proposal is contextualist comes closest to the one in which the proposal in Lewis (1979) is. Note that a similar remark of caution may be made regarding the term 'relativism'. Indeed, relativism in the sense of (i), which is arguably Richard's relativism, is very different from, for instance, the relativism of MacFarlane (ms.).

9 I have laid out an earlier version of this line of criticism, albeit directed at the proposals given in Kölbel (2002) and Lasersohn (2005), in Stojanovic (2007).

> your belief ought be evaluated relative to my criteria. In such a case it will be sensible for me to evaluate your belief relative to them. In a case like this—in which there is single perspective relative to which it is sensible to evaluate both your belief that Mary is rich and my belief that she is not—we disagree. To say that x and y disagree is to say that there is a content p such that one of x and y believes it, the other believes its denial, and there is a circumstance relative to which it is appropriate to evaluate both x's belief and y's belief." (2011, p. 6).

Setting aside some subtle changes in Richard's view, my immediate aim is to convince you that this sort of proposal cannot give you the sort of disagreement that Richard was after; namely, one in which we truly disagree, but are both right. My argument may be fragmented down as follows:

1) Suppose, as Richard does, that the content of belief and assertion can have different truth values when evaluated relative to different perspectives.

2) Suppose furthermore, as Richard does, too (as is fairly clear from the second quote above) that Didi and Naomi are aware of this feature of the semantics of terms such as 'rich' – namely, that such a content needs to be evaluated at some perspective in order to have a truth value.

3) Suppose furthermore that in asserting that Mary is rich, Didi aims at saying something true, and that similarly, in asserting that she isn't, Naomi aims at saying something true.

4) From (2) and (3), it follows that in asserting that Mary is rich, Didi must intend her claim to be evaluated for truth at some specific perspective; similarly for Naomi.[10]

5) Suppose that Didi intends both hers and Naomi's claim to be evaluated with respect to her own perspective, while Naomi intends both hers and Didi's claim to be evaluated with respect to *her* own perspective.

6) Recall that, given (2), both Didi and Naomi are aware that contents of this sort can have different truth values relative to different perspectives – so it's not as if Didi thought that *her* perspective was *the only* perspective at which such a content can be reasonably evaluated; and similarly for Naomi.

10 One reason for including the recent passage is, precisely, to show that Richard endorses the idea that speakers who assert perspective-relative contents also have beliefs (and, I would add, intentions) as to the perspective relative to which the content should be evaluated.

Conclusion 1. I submit that, under the assumption in (5), and the clarification in (6), the disagreement between Didi and Naomi is on a par with the disagreement that they would express were Didi to say "From my perspective, Mary is rich" and were Naomi to reply, "From mine, she isn't". Admittedly, there is a sense of 'disagreement' on which we disagree if we simply state that we have different standards of weath and different perspectives on the issue of who should count as 'rich' and who shouldn't. But I contend that this is a much weaker sense of disagreement than the one that Richard had been pursuing from the start. When the two parties assert perspectival claims that they intend to be evaluated relative to their own respective perspectives, it seems correct to say that genuine, *true* disagreement gives out.

Conclusion 2. Drop (5) and suppose, on the other hand, that there is a certain common perspective at which both Didi and Naomi intend their claims to be evaluated for truth value.[11] In that case, they truly disagree. However, only one of the two will then be right. In other words, under this assumptions, we've got a hold on disagreement, but it is *faultlessness* that must now give out.

Sect. III Faultless disagreement as *forward-looking* disagreement

In this final section, I want to look at the more promising side of Richard's proposal, and the idea that in between purely factual and merely verbal disagreements, there is an important class of disagreements that turn upon the fact that the concepts that they involve are still, as it were, under construction. As applied to Didi's and Naomi's case, the idea would be that they share a certain concept of richness, but this concept is still underdetermined and does not specify whether a person with one million dollars falls under it or not. Since this might not be the most illuminating example, let me propose a different one, to illustrate the idea as I understand it.

Suppose that Didi and Naomi are debating whether to hire Khaled. Didi says, "he has a strong publication record, with over 20 publications", and Naomi replies, "oh no, he has less than 20 publications." Suppose that Didi and Naomi know exactly what Khaled has written and published and where – in other words, they know all

11 It is actually enough that Didi and Naomi presuppose that they have a shared perspective, and intend their claims to be evaluated at that perspective. For an account roughly along these lines, see e.g. López de Sa (2008).

the relevant facts. Furthermore, let there be among Khaled's productions a number of online conference working papers, and suppose that when those are taken into account, he has more than 20 items, but not otherwise. Now, if Didi counts such working papers as "publications" while Naomi doesn't, then their disagreement turns precisely on the question of what one ought to count as a publication. To put it differently, the concept of a publication that they share does not yet determine by itself whether an online conference working paper should or shouldn't fall in its extension. Given this indeterminacy, a practical issue will arise for Didi and Naomi (and, more generally, for their academic community) to decide whether or not to extend the concept of 'publication' in such a way as to include among its instances a certain kind of "new" objects, namely, online conference working papers, or not.[12]

What I would like to suggest is that the best way of understanding Richard's constructive proposal is to consider Didi's and Naomi's disagreement whether Mary is rich as a case of *practical* disagreement over the issue of how to best construe and apply the concept of 'rich'.[13] If we accept the idea of an underdetermined concept, then a disagreement that involves such a concept will easily turn out to be faultless. For, at the time of the disagreement, the concept's precise extension is not yet fully determined, and so neither of the parties is strictly speaking wrong. But note that even if, at the time of the dispute, the concept may be open-ended, and the two parties' claims, though in apparent contradiction, may be such that neither is false (since neither has a truth value yet), the way in which the concept is going to develop will make it possible to decide, albeit retrospectively, which of the two parties got it right.

Let me take stock. After having seen, in the previous section, that the relativist proposal on its own doesn't take us very far, we have turned to the contextualist ideas incorporated in Richard's view, and, in particular, the idea that the concepts themselves (some contextualists would say: *meanings* themselves) are continuously changing and, normally, getting more precise. In this picture, when we have a concept such that its previous uses do not enable us to tell whether a given object

12 To some, this may look like a sheer case of metalinguistic disagreement. However, although I do not deny that there may be a metalinguistic component involved, what matters is the difference with other cases of (arguably) metalinguistic disagreement, where people go into a dispute simply because they happen to attach different meanings to the words used – as would be, to take an extreme case, a dispute over the question whether Khaled lives near a bank, in which the one party intends to be talking about a river bank, and the other, about a financial institution.

13 The idea of linking the putative cases of *faultless* disagreement to those of *practical* disagreement has been floating in the air for some time now, and I am not sure to whom exactly it should be credited.

falls under the concept or not, if one party says that it does and the other says that it doesn't, we will have disagreement, yet a faultless one, precisely because it is not yet determined whether we want the future uses of the concept to apply or not to the instance at stake.

It should be noted that Richard himself does not put his point quite in the same terms; but I believe that the reconstruction that I am proposing does not distort his view either. Now, a further suggestion that I have advanced is that the two parties' claims are not to be viewed so much as *truth-apt* claims (to borrow Richard's term), but rather, as *proposals* as to how to extend the future uses of the concept under debate. That is, a disagreement of this sort may be viewed, in a way, as a *practical* disagreement over the issue of how to best extend, or precisify, a concept that is underdetermined.

The last issue that I want to address is the question of what precisely makes such disagreements *substantive*. Richard's book is, in a way, deceiving, for when he comes to that very issue, he confesses that "all the hard work is yet to come" (p. 123). Of course, it would be unreasonable for me to hope to do any of that hard work in this paper, so what I simply want to do is point to a direction that may be worth exploring. What we have reached so far by following Richard's strategy (as I have proposed to reconstruct it) are two observations: (i) 'rich' disagreements typically turn upon concepts that are shared but still open-ended, allowing for instances for which it is not yet determined whether they fall under the concept or not; (ii) faced with such instances, the users of the concept at stake will face a practical decision as to whether they should extend their use of the concept in such a way that it applies to the instance or not. In other words, we are led to the idea that 'rich' disagreements are a species of practical disagreements. Now, in reply to the substantivity issue, one might want to say that practical disagreements are substantive *by their very nature*. I don't think that this is a satisfactory reply, for it merely dodges the issue. Conversely, I don't think either that our reply in the specific case of 'rich' disagreements ought to extend to other cases of practical disagreement (even if it might).

My own reply, albeit very tentative, is to say that even if, at the time of the dispute, it is not yet determined whether an instance falls under the concept or not, the way in which the concept evolves and gets sharpened will eventually make it possible to determine whether it does, and to decide, retrospectively, which of the

two parties was right.[14]

Two worries immediately come to mind. First, what about cases in which the disagreement results in there becoming two distinct concepts where there used to be a single underdetermined concept? Both parties will be right, yet their disagreement is still substantive. Second, what about cases in which the concept never gets sharpened in a way that determines whether a given instance falls under it or not? The first type of case would be one in which, in the previous example, we would end up with two concepts of a publication: a wide one that includes conference working papers, and a narrow one that doesn't; both Didi, claiming that Khaled had more than 20 publications, and Naomi, claiming that he didn't, would have then be right – under the relevant disambiguations of 'publication'. Note that such an outcome of their dispute would bring their case much closer to the cases of metalinguistic disagreement.[15] The second type of case, on the other hand, would make us wonder to which extent we should think of such a disagreement as being *substantive*. Of course, this will turn on what we want from a disagreement to count as 'substantive'. How are we to think of a disagreement that, as the worry has it, can never ever get resolved in the future? Are there realistic cases of such disagreements? One sub-type of this sort of case would be a dispute involving an underdetermined concept such that some time following the dispute the concept goes out of existence without being relevantly sharpened. Past disputes among alchemists, for instance, are likely to be good candidates for this type of disagreement. In many such cases, I think, we would not want to view such disagreements as substantive (even if they were viewed as such by the disagreeing parties at the time of the dispute). Another sub-type of this sort of case would be disputes involving concepts that never go out of existence, but can never get sharpened either. Though we cannot know whether there will ever be any such concepts, and whether any of the concepts we have turn out to be such, we can still ask ourselves whether, under the hypothesis that a given dispute involves such a concept, we have a genuine disagreement. And it seems to me that to disagree over a concept that, by hypothesis, can never get sharpened, is not so different from being in a deadlock, in which *true* disagreement has given out.*

14 If the suggestion that I am sketching, according to which 'rich' disagreements are tightly linked to the indeterminacy of the future (viz. of the way in which the concept at stake *will* evolve), is on the right track, that would lend support to MacFarlane's suggestion that the strongest case for relativism is that of the open future (see MacFarlane 2003).

15 Note that metalinguistic disagreements themselves can be substantive, as emphasized, for instance, in Sosa (ms.) or in Sundell (2010).

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